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SUBJECT: TURKISH PRESS SLAMS US DETENTION OF TURKISH SPECIAL FORCES

REF: ANKARA 4232

¶1. Public reaction and rhetoric about the Turkish SF detained in Iraq continues to mount in Turkey as evidenced by increasingly large demonstrations at our missions and more vociferous statements to the press by government officials.

Headlines in July 6 major Turkish newspapers -- "The Ugly American," (Milliyet) "What Kind of Strategic Partner?" (Radikal) reflect the overall tone of the local press. Much of the anger is directed against Col. William Mayville, whom most assume to have led the US operation in Suleymaniye. A front-page headline in "Hurriyet," Turkey's largest-circulation daily, reads "let this man know his place." "Sabah" details a list of "evidence" that Col. Mayville has systematically favored the Kurds at the expense of Turkmen and Arabs in northern Iraq.

¶2. Many press articles characterize the US action as an attempt to force all Turkish troops out of northern Iraq, and a "Hurriyet" columnist claims that all Turkish SF have been asked by the US to leave within 3 months. Most also speculate that US forces relied on PUK intelligence sources to justify the raid, and left-leaning "Cumhuriyet" suggests Kurdish groups are "provoking" the US into taking actions that are "dragging Northern Iraq toward instability." A Washington correspondent for "Sabah" argues the operation was carried out without the prior knowledge of the State Department, the White House, or senior US civilian authorities in Iraq. Prominent "Radikal" columnist Murat Yetkin, however, claims that the US delay in giving a full explanation of the incident leads to the conclusion that the action was part of "US state policy" rather than a local military initiative.

¶3. All papers carry statements by opposition party leaders condemning the detentions and blasting the AKP government for "weakness" or negligence" for failing to prevent them. Articles claim that the Secretary confirmed to FM Gul that 24 Turks had been taken to Baghdad and were still under detention. The Secretary reportedly told Gul that he hoped the situation could be resolved by Sunday evening. Gul told the press that he viewed the incident as a "local event" of which Washington "was not informed." The FM also reaffirmed his intention to visit Washington in coming days.

¶4. Leftist Labor Party leader and troublemaker Dogu Perincek continued to stir anti-American sentiment. Perincek reportedly commented on Turkish television that "it would be good" if Turkey were to take some American officers prisoner.

PEARSON